

Present, Past, and Future: Our Rising Issue of Asian Discrimination

We're living in a historic era – one where the fear of disease is governing almost all of the world's actions, and one that cannot be overcome on one's own. That's why in a perfect world, it would make sense for everyone within our nation to work together and treat one another with compassion, regardless of race, gender, or political perspective. Unfortunately, our nation isn't perfect. As a matter of fact, it actually seems like many societal problems are being exacerbated, including the issue of racism. With the recent association of the virus and China, this issue is currently being centered around the Asian American community. There's a present xenophobic mentality towards Asian Americans that will most likely continue in the future as a result of this pandemic. By looking at the present, future and past, I hope to shed light onto just how prevalent this issue is as well as why I don't think this issue will disappear once the pandemic ends despite many believing that this issue is one not worth discussing.

I first want to show how Asian American discrimination is something that's both real and amplified by this current pandemic. And there's no better place to find examples of this than the present. One notable example is in a recent [New York Times article](#) that tells the story of Yuanyuan Zhu, who was verbally abused and spit on when she was walking to the gym. And it's not just her. The article also mentions how, in interviews with other Asian Americans, "nearly two dozen Asian-Americans across the country said they were afraid – to go grocery shopping, to travel alone on subways or buses, to let their children go outside," coinciding with recent rises in verbal and physical assault reports in Asian American communities. What's even more worrying is how this might affect the behavior of Asian Americans now that the virus is in America. A recent [study](#) published in The Lancet notes that "bias against a certain group of people on the basis of a limited set of probable confounding factors might lead to shame, stress, and stigma that prevents true carriers from reporting their condition to official bodies and receiving timely health-care attention." By driving a wedge between fellow Americans through discrimination, those who are racist against Asian Americans might actually end up putting themselves and other Americans at greater risk. But this kind of fear won't end once the infection ends. That's why we need to be looking to the future, after the pandemic.

Looking to the future is an important part in talking about this issue. If we don't think about our current actions and question how they affect our future, we might end up normalizing harmful behaviors. Unfortunately, there's a real risk of a stigma forming against Asian Americans due to this kind of normalization. One example of this was when Donald Trump crossed out the "Corona" in Coronavirus and replaced it

with “Chinese” during a [recent White House briefing](#), despite many warning him that the term “China Virus” could lead to greater Asian American discrimination. While the physical and verbal abuse of Asian Americans is harmful in the present, it’s the normalization of discrimination in everyday life that’s more likely to leave a lasting stigma in the future. And it’s easy to predict where such stigmas would be most prevalent in the future too. According to a [study](#) published recently in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, people “living in U.S. states in which disease rates are higher display increased implicit (automatic) and explicit (conscious) racial prejudice.” This means that Asian Americans are at an even greater risk in infection hotspots such as New York and New Jersey if this kind of everyday discrimination is normalized. Because of this, we absolutely need to make sure to address this kind of racism in everyday life so that discrimination of Asian Americans doesn’t become normalized in the future.

Despite the fact that many Asian Americans are having to deal with so much hardship, there are still many people who either believe that Asian Americans are actually more likely to be infected (thus justifying their fear), or who continue to normalize discriminating behaviors despite their harmful effects. To this, I point to the past to show how this has all happened before. According to a recent [Time article](#), America has a long history of blaming other countries and races for disease. One of the most infamous examples of this involves the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which differentiated between “legal” and “illegal” immigration and came “after decades of stereotyping Chinese immigrants as more likely to carry diseases like cholera and smallpox.” This was despite the fact that these diseases flourished in Europe and the Americas, respectively. Similarly, according to [a study by Roger Keil and Harris Ali](#), at York University, during the 2003 SARS outbreak, which was labeled as a “Chinese disease,” many of the Chinatowns in Toronto were abandoned due to their association with the disease: “Racialization occurred through the association of the disease with things Chinese, exotic and familiar, that were extraneous to the existing Chinatowns in downtown Toronto.” Just like how the normalization of a discriminating label contributed to the abandonment of various Chinatowns, the normalization of terms like “China Virus” today can also have negative consequences in the long term if not addressed properly today.

Discrimination is an issue affecting countless Asian Americans in the present because of this pandemic. In addition to the present, there’s a real risk of this issue affecting the future due to the normalization of discriminating terms and actions. And there’s also many parallels that can be drawn between this current situation and past instances of disease-related discrimination in America. Even though these points sound

grim, I hope that looking at this issue in terms of the present, future, and past will keep history from repeating itself and allow us to overcome this pandemic hand-in-hand instead of divided.